

International Conference

# Herodian // Historiography and Literature at the End of the High Empire

TU Dresden // 14–15 July 2022

## ***Tra storia e propaganda: Erodiano, Pertinace e Settimio Severo***

Alessandro Galimberti (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore)

La figura di Pertinace in Erodiano potrebbe essere definita una felice anomalia in quanto lo storico addita nel principe ligure un modello da imitare, quasi al pari dell'irraggiungibile Marco Aurelio.

Tuttavia, se guardiamo ai fatti, il principato di Pertinace non può che essere giudicato fallimentare: sia per la sua brevità (tre mesi) sia per i risultati ottenuti (un difficile tentativo di riforma economica e il fallimento nell'ottenere il consenso dei soldati). Come spiegare dunque l'entusiasmo di Erodiano per Pertinace?

Io credo che innanzitutto ciò vada spiegato con il fatto che per Erodiano Pertinace abbia dato vita sul piano del modello politico al sistema che corrisponde all'ideale politico del nostro storico, vale a dire un regime che preveda non solo la collaborazione al governo tra il *princeps* e il ceto senatorio, ma una collaborazione tra senatori e i cittadini migliori, non solo gli aristocratici per nascita ma anche coloro che sanno distinguersi per virtù proprie, come nel caso di Pertinace, di modeste origini ma autore di una carriera eccezionale.

Ritengo poi che la costruzione del personaggio Pertinace in Erodiano risponda a precise ragioni storiografiche. Credo infatti che non si possa trascurare il fatto che Erodiano – per sua stessa ammissione – conoscesse e dunque, molto probabilmente,

utilizasse nella sua opera *l'Autobiografia* di Settimio Severo. Non è improbabile, in considerazione dell'atteggiamento assunto da Severo nei confronti di Pertinace - di cui si fece vendicatore non appena conquistò il potere - che la presentazione di Pertinace e dunque la costruzione del suo personaggio, fosse molto positiva, ciò che corrisponde al ritratto offerto da Erodiano.

### ***Hérodien et le mélange des genres***

Karine Laporte (Universiteit Leiden)

À en croire la critique des siècles précédents, Hérodien aurait écrit tout sauf de l'« histoire » : un roman historique avant l'heure, une collection de biographies, un miroir des princes, un abrégé d'autres sources plus fiables, ou même un collage d'exercices scolaires. Si, de façon générale, les études plus récentes s'accordent pour maintenir la nature historique de l'œuvre d'Hérodien, que ce soit au plan de la véracité historique ou des procédés historiographiques, on tend peut-être encore à trop séparer le « littéraire » de l'« historique ». L'historicité de certains passages de ce texte (e.g. la mort de Marc Aurèle, l'assassinat de Commode, l'accession de Didius Julianus) continue en effet d'être questionnée, autant par rapport au contenu qu'à la présentation, et ces épisodes sont plus facilement rapprochés de genres littéraires jugés contraires à l'histoire, comme la tragédie ou le roman. Je propose, pour cette communication, d'examiner certaines scènes de *l'Histoire des empereurs* précisément dans ce qu'elles présentent de tragique, comique ou romanesque, afin d'articuler ces spécificités génériques avec la qualité historique du texte d'Hérodien et de les intégrer à la logique d'ensemble de l'œuvre. On pourra aussi s'interroger, plus largement, sur la part de ce « mélange » dans l'écriture d'une histoire impériale du troisième siècle.

### ***The Historia Augusta as Reader of Herodian***

Adam Kemezis (University of Alberta, Canada)

The *Historia Augusta* (composed c. 400 CE) uses Herodian as a principal source for the lives of Maximinus, the Gordians and Maximus and Balbinus, and as an intermittent source for the reigns of Macrinus, Elagabalus and Alexander. Furthermore, the *HA* cites Herodian

twelve times by name (albeit not always the correct name). This is a rare opportunity to compare a historiographical text with in detail with a later author using it as a source, and *HA*'s practices in this regard, naturally, have been studied in great detail. This paper will supplement this work with rhetorical analysis of how the *HA* constructs Herodian and positions itself relative to his work. Seen in the context of the overall shape of the two authors' narratives, the citations and tacit adaptation show the *HA* as an engaged reader of Herodian's text who playfully rewrites his versions of figures including Clodius Albinus, Macrinus and Alexander, as well as the key players in the coups and wars of 238. Herodian is at once a privileged source of (often spurious) authority, a site of ironic allusion for a knowing readership and a foil for the *HA*'s narrative persona(e). I will attempt to derive insights into the readership and reception of Herodian's text in fourth-century Rome, considering also the parallel allusions to him found in Ammianus Marcellinus.

***Vain Ambition, Futile Imitation: The Pattern of Failing "Philosophers"***  
***in Herodian's Narrative***

Mario Baumann / Maria-Eirini Zacharioudaki (TU Dresden)

Herodian's History is dedicated to highlighting the failure of Marcus Aurelius' successors. The presentation will be focusing on two major aspects of the text: on emperors as philosophers' caricatures and – secondly – on the unsuccessful parental and teaching figures concerning (philosophical) education. In the first book, Commodus is warned in vain about Perennius' plot by a pseudo-philosopher. The whole scene resembles a philosopher's caricature appearing on stage, and with this episode, a sequence of similar caricatures, this time in the guise of emperors, starts emerging in Herodian's text. The first notorious case is Pertinax who introduces his philosophical way of thought into his ruling power and partially achieves reviving M. Aurelius' governance. Nevertheless, his unsuccessful imperial career is indisputable. As for the second aspect, Marcus Aurelius' and Septimius Severus' numerous but pointless attempts to educate their sons will underpin the issue of ineducable students' philosophical criticism. Not only Commodus but Caracalla as well turn out to be negative counterparts of their predecessors, and they will be assessed as rulers by their upbringings and their fathers' educative attempts. In

this context, the long history of the pattern of failed students and teachers of philosophy, reaching back to Socrates, will also be brought up.

### ***Collective memory and its limits in Herodian's Roman History***

Andrew G. Scott (Villanova University, USA)

This paper examines the concepts of memory, emulation, and imitation in Herodian's history. From its opening lines, Herodian's work concerns itself with collective memory (1.1.3). His starting point is the death of Marcus Aurelius, and for this figure Herodian adopts an image that was honed and cultivated by the collective memory of the prior generations. Herodian uses this idealized figure not just to judge the behavior of Marcus' successors but, as this paper contends, to test the limits of the empire's collective memory. At the beginning of the work, Marcus' memory is "undying" (1.4.6, 7; 1.6.6; cf. 1.5.7, 1.8.3), though when subsequent rulers decide to emulate or copy the actions and behavior of others, his memory is replaced (e.g., by the memory of figures like Commodus, Pertinax, or Caracalla) or diluted (as in Macrinus' emulation of Marcus). Whereas Marcus won the admiration of all, later periods witnessed different preferences between Rome's elite and the military. Herodian's attention to these changes tracks alongside the reversal of power dynamic between elites and the soldiers and suggests that the memory of a good emperor was not durable enough in the face of a fragmenting empire.

### ***Group Minds in Herodian's History and Chariton's Callirhoe***

Chrysanthos S. Chrysanthou (Heidelberg University)

Herodian's *History* has often been considered as an inaccurate historical source and reduced to nothing more than a 'historical novel' (e.g. Hohl 1954; Alföldy 1971, 87–88). Such readings are misleading not only because they impose modern standards and ideas on Herodian's work, but also because they rely on a failed understanding of how the genres of history and novel functioned in antiquity. In my paper I will reconsider the relationship between Herodian's historiography and novelistic writing from a wholly different perspective, namely that of 'cognitive narratology'. More precisely, I will examine

instances of ‘intermentality and ‘group thinking’ in Herodian’s *History* and Chariton’s *Callirhoe*—a novel which was written about the middle of the first century AD or a little before and which has also been characterized by modern critics as ‘historical novel’ (e.g. Hägg 1987, 194–7; Hunter 1994).

In both Herodian’s *History* and Chariton’s *Callirhoe*, the public mental functioning of characters and their collective thought assume significant narrative presence. Groups of various sizes often have the tendency to think together on certain issues or perform such joint activities as problem solving and decision-making. In this paper I will examine whether and to what extent there are any commonalities or contrasts between Herodian and Chariton in terms of: (a) their techniques of consciousness representation; (b) their use of collective cognition in the construction of plot and characterisation; and (c) their use of collective minds in their individual analyses of the psychology and sociology of the ancient world. This comparative investigation will illuminate further whether and to what degree there is any kind of relationship between Herodian’s historiography and novelistic writing.

Cited Bibliography:

Alföldy, G. (1971). “Der Friedensschluß des Kaisers Commodus mit den Germanen”, *Historia* 20, 84–109.

Hägg, T. (1987). “‘Callirhoe’ and ‘Parthenope’: The Beginnings of the Historical Novel”, *CIAnt* 6.2, 184–204.

Hohl, E. (1954). *Kaiser Commodus und Herodian*. Berlin.

Hunter, R. (1994). “History and Historicity in the Romance of Chariton”, *ANRW* II.34.2, 1055–1086.

### ***Zwischen pragmatischer Geschichtsschreibung und Biographie:***

#### ***Herodian und ein neues Zeitmaß***

Laura Mecella (Università degli Studi di Milano)

Starting from the analysis of History’s prooimion, the paper aims to analyse why Herodian decided to narrate κατὰ χρόνους καὶ δυναστείας. The interest in the lives of emperors and usurpers diverges from the biographical genre as it was usually intended (in the Third Century it is still represented, among others, by Marius Maximus). Despite the presence of moralistic elements, the focus on the political-military aspects of the imperial power

assigns a significant role to the development of the μοναρχία τῶν Καισαρῶν and the features of the autocratic government. This theme emerges during the Third Century, and it is predominant in Late Antiquity: it will determine the success, among the following historians, of a chronological order based on the reigns of the emperors.

### **Týchē and kairós in Herodian's *Ab excessu divi Marci***

Panagiotis Androulakis (University of Crete)

*Týchē* and *kairós* are abstract notions, but in antiquity they were sometimes personified into deities and worshipped. In Plato's *Leges* (709b) Athenaëus links both of them –as deities– with the divine (θεός); all three of them are the governors of human affairs. As abstract notions, *kairós* represents the right or advantageous moment, an opportunity which someone needs to seize because time flies away, while *týchē* represents the serendipitous and chance, the irrational changeability of human affairs due to a superhuman and inexplicable parameter.

In Herodian's *Ab excessu divi Marci*, the continuous alternation of emperors during 180-238 CE is marked by incidental events (*týchē*) which intervene in the main events narrated and change the expectations of the protagonists or, in other times, they happen for the rescue of those in need by intercepting malpractices or crises, such as conspiracies. It is interesting, because Herodian does not refer to notions of predetermined conditions such as fate (*moîra* is only used to state a share or a squadron), gods or destiny (despite one mention of πεπρωμένον by Laetus in a rhetorical topos). It is, also, rather interesting that variants of the word *kairós* are not used in the last two books, not even as formulaic phrases to denote simultaneous events or to point to a specific period; contrary, Herodian refers to *týchē* very often in the third, seventh and eighth books.

The historian refers to *týchē* and to *kairós* very often, thus raising questions regarding their function in the text, as well as his beliefs upon the changeability of human affairs, which collides with the choice of the right time. This conference paper aims at deciphering the use of these two words in Herodian's historiography and answer questions upon his reflection of the Roman Empire during the above mentioned period.

Selected bibliography:

- Frost-Benedict A. (2002). "On Doing the Right Thing at the Right Time: Toward an Ethics of *Kairos*", in: *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Praxis*. Ed. Sipiora Ph. & Baumlin J. S. (New York): 226-236.
- Giannopoulou V. (2000). "Divine Agency and 'Tyche' in Euripides' 'Ion': Ambiguity and Shifting Perspectives". *Illinois Classical Studies*, vols. 24/25: 257-271.
- Hidber T. (2004). "Herodian", in: *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives in Ancient Greek Narrative*, vol.1. Ed. de Jong I. (Leiden/Boston): 201-210.
- Kemezis A. M. (2014). *Greek Narratives of the Roman Empire under the Severans: Cassius Dio, Philostratus and Herodian*. Cambridge.
- Scott A. G. (2018) "Conspiracy as Plot Type in Herodian's *Roman History*". *Mnemosyne* 71: 434-459.
- Trédé-Boulmer M. (2015). *Kairos. L'à-propos et l'occasion. Le mot et la notion, d'Homère à la fin du IVe siècle avant J.-C.* (Collection d'Études Anciennes, Série Grecque, 150.) Paris.
- Walbank Fr. W. (2007). "Fortune (*tychē*) in Polybius", in: *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, vol.1. Ed. Marincola J. (Malden MA): 349-355.

### ***The Spatial Dimension of Politics in Herodian's Roman History***

Konstantin V. Markov (Lobachevsky State University of Nizhni Novgorod, Russia)

The last decade has seen an increasing interest by scholars in spatial aspects of Herodian's (fl. 230-250 CE) representation of political processes in the Roman Empire under the last Antonines and Severans. As has been shown (Pitcher 2012; Kemezis 2014), spatial details had particular narrative functions in Herodian's history. The author pays special attention to the problems of control over space, specifically the borders of the Empire. He focuses on the situation in border areas and changes in the topography of borders. Another important topic is the struggle for space within the borders of the Empire. Success or defeat of political leaders involved in the power struggle is often linked to their ability to control the Empire's space. Therefore, the spatial characteristics of the political process perform thematic, symbolic and characterizing functions and contribute to a deeper insight into the personal traits of politicians. My aim is to add to this picture by focusing on Herodian's vision of the correlation between control over space and the social basis of imperial power. Space categories might serve as markers indicating who the emperor's supporters were. For example, Commodus begins as an emperor favoured by the

majority of the imperial population, an emperor for everyone. However, he degenerates gradually into an emperor for his confidants from among freedmen, especially when staying somewhere on outskirts of Rome (1.12.5–6), and finishes as a ruler of gladiators controlling nothing but the barracks. In some other passages, especially those on Niger (2.8.10) or Macrinus' itinerary (5.3.2), representation of the political importance of a place is centered on the opportunities it provides for achieving consensus between politicians and troops or the population, which might shed more light on Herodian's perception of the genesis of political fragmentation of the Empire after Marcus Aurelius.

### ***Herodian's History and the Distant Past***

Sulochana R. Asirvatham (Montclair State University, USA)

Herodian's *History* is known for its predominantly linear narrative on the reigns of Commodus through Gordian III. While the history's impression of straightforwardness is (as Adam Kemezis has argued) deceptively at odds with its narrative of "dysfunctional Rome", his subject matter is very much the Roman present (with the recent reigns of Marcus and Pertinax standing for the past against which the present is measured). As a result, in contrast to what we see in most other imperial Greek writers, Herodian's Hellenism also appears to be a thing of the present, manifested primarily in his obsession with *paideia* (discussed at length by Sidebottom).

That said, the *History* does contain various references to people and moments from the historical past, which this paper seeks to catalogue and contextualize with two main questions in mind. First, in what circumstances are references to the distant past likely to come up? Three random examples give a sense of the range: Herodian's citing the Trojan origins of the statue of Pallas in the Temple of Vesta, which he proudly claims he and his generation were the first to see exposed (1.14.4); Marcus Aurelius's thought-bubble on the fate of various too-young rulers like Dionysius of Sicily, Alexander the Great, and Alexander's Successors; Nero and Domitian (1.3.2-4); Herodian's own authoritative references to Caracalla "becoming" Alexander and admiring Sulla and Hannibal (4.7.8-4.8.5). Second, given that Herodian references both Greek and Roman myth/history, does he show any particular bias towards one tradition? Are these traditions, conversely,

equally relevant to the present, as Marcus Aurelius's thoughts would suggest? Or, given that Herodian's Romans rarely learn from the past, are they ultimately both equally purposeless?

### ***Herodian's Roman Empire: "An Alien Monarchy"?***

Alexander V. Makhlaiuk (Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod, Russia)

Harry Sidebottom, in his seminal work "Herodian's Historical Methods and Understanding of History" (ANRW II.34.4, 1997, p. 2824), has argued that for Herodian the Roman empire was an alien monarchy, and he does not identify himself with the Romans. However other scholars, as for example Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen (in Jesper Madsen & Roger Rees (eds), "Roman Rule in Greek and Latin Writing: Double Vision." Leiden–Boston, 2014, p. 225), suppose that Herodian was also Roman, whatever the precise nature of his Greek roots. According to Graham Andrews (Rethinking the Third Century CE: Contemporary Historiography and Political Narrative. Dissertation. University of London, 2018, p. 137), "Herodian presents an external view of Rome, which at least appears free from the social biases which are common in the elite world of literature." Lucas de Blois considers Herodian, like Cassius Dio, although less explicitly, as an advocate of a strong monarchical government in a fixed hierarchical socio-political system ('The perception of Roman imperial authority in Herodian's work', in "The representation and perception of Roman imperial power: Proceedings of the third workshop of the international network Impact of empire." Amsterdam, 2003, p. 149–150). Adam Kemezis focuses on the dysfunctionality of the (post-Marcus) world Herodian portrayed, showing the breakdown of Roman empire's unity as expressed not only geographically but socially ("Greek Narratives of the Roman Empire under the Severans: Cassius Dio, Philostratus and Herodian. Greek Culture in the Roman World." Cambridge–New York, 2014). Thus, there is a great difference, and even contradictions, in current scholarly assessments of Herodian's general view of the Roman empire and the extent of his 'Greekness' and 'Romanness'. My paper aims to evaluate the arguments in favor of the named viewpoints and, by clarifying some detail of Herodian's narrative, to accentuate the author's essential 'Greekness' and specific 'Greek romanity' (*une romanité grecque* – Roques D. Le vocabulaire politique d'Hérodien.

*Ktèma*<sup>15</sup>, 1990) in his cultural identity and representation of Rome and the Roman empire.

### ***Longing for a Good Ruler: Echoes of Alexander the Great in Herodian***

Christopher Baron (University of Notre Dame, USA)

The Alexander-imitation indulged in by the emperor Caracalla is well known. Although far removed from the events described in Herodian's History, the great Macedonian conqueror is mentioned occasionally elsewhere in the work. In this paper I hope to examine some ways in which Herodian's initial portrayal of Commodus contains potential allusions to Alexander the Great: in the themes of empire and succession, in Commodus' physical appearance, and (most interestingly) in Herodian's use of the word *πόθος*. This term, usually meaning "longing, desire," serves as a leitmotif running throughout Arrian's *Anabasis* and seems to have been considered a particular characteristic of Alexander's. Thus it is possible that its repeated occurrence in the opening chapters of Herodian's History (in direct speeches by Marcus Aurelius and Pompeianus, and by the narrator himself) would have recalled Alexander to the reader's mind. I will also analyze the appearance of the word *πόθος* in the rest of Herodian's work, notably its use to describe the love or affection felt by groups of people for good rulers – bringing the discussion back to Marcus and the failure of Commodus to live up to his father's example.

### ***Herodian and Stasis***

Luke Pitcher (Somerville College, Oxford)

Recent years have seen several studies of how imperial historians conceptualize civil discord. Price 2015 sees *stasis* overcome as pivotal to Appian's concept of Roman success. Lange 2019 examines *stasis* in the early books of Cassius Dio.

Herodian's concept of *stasis* has generally found less attention, apart from his claim that the Greeks remain susceptible to it (Hdn. 3.2.7, with Bekker-Nielsen 2014). Such relative neglect is understandable; Herodian is usually more interested in other ways of conceptualizing the issues that face his emperors and pretenders. Herodian's *stasis* has

its interest, nonetheless. This paper argues that comparison of Herodian's *stasis* with that of earlier historians reveals both concinnities and significant divergences.

T. Bekker-Nielsen, "Herodian on Greek and Roman Failings", in J. Madsen and R. Rees (eds.), *Roman Rule in Greek and Latin Writing* (Leiden, 2014), 224-245.

C. Lange, "Cassius Dio on Violence, *Stasis*, and Civil War: The Early Years", in C. Burden-Strevens and M. Lindholmer (eds.), *Cassius Dio's Forgotten History of Early Rome* (Leiden, 2019), 165-189.

J. Price, "Thucydidean *Stasis* and the Roman Empire in Appian's Interpretation of History", in K. Welch (ed.), *Appian's Roman History: Empire and Civil War* (Swansea, 2015), 45-64.